

EDITORIAL: INTERPRETING FOR THE DEAF-BLIND

by

Robert J. Smithdas

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EDITORIAL

INTERPRETING FOR THE DEAF-BLIND

By Robert J. Smithdas, Litt.D.

There are many variables that affect direct, person-to-person communication with deaf-blind individuals. Because they are individuals, deaf-blind people differ widely from one another in their abilities to communicate effectively with others. Much depends upon the deaf-blind person's degree of education, understanding of vocabulary and language, flexibility in using various methods of communication, and the degree of exposure to life experiences.

An intelligent deaf-blind person who has had a good education and an active social life definitely has the advantage over those who have been denied the opportunity to develop their innate capacities to the fullest degree. We live in a world of changing ideas and events, and to be well adjusted, despite the limiting effect of severe disabilities, one must be aware of them and their causes and effects.

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There is also the purely human variable of how well an individual absorbs and retains information.

Considering all these factors, interpreting for deaf-blind persons can be challenging. An interpreter needs to determine which method of communication is preferred by the deaf-blind person, his level of language and level of comprehension. If possible, an interpreter should meet the deaf-blind person beforehand and become familiar with the best means of communication and the capacity for information suitable to that person.

There has been a movement to define the rights of interpreters while interpreting for the deaf or deaf-blind during meetings and conferences.

Since interpreting involves sending and receiving information, it is logical that deaf-blind people also have rights relative to interpreting. Thus far, no actual code has been formulated, but a few suggestions are obvious:

1. The deaf-blind persons should have the



right to choose an interpreter they understand well, if a choice is available.

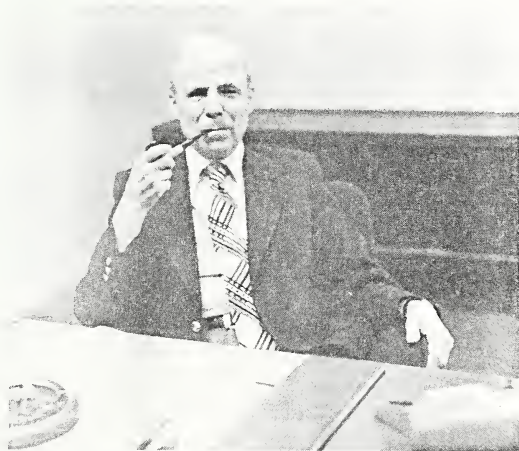
2. They have the right to ask an interpreter to slow down the pace of interpreting if they have difficulty in following the subject.
3. They have the right to ask the interpreter to repeat, or clarify, if they do not understand the context of the material being interpreted.
4. They have the right—or should have the right—to change interpreters if they are unable to understand the one who is assigned to interpret.
5. They should have the right to change positions with the interpreter if they find a given position tiring during a long meeting.
6. They have the right to expect a literal, objective interpretation not influenced by the interpreter's personal views.

These are merely suggestions for future consideration—not a definitive code. After all, interpreting is a two-way affair,




including both sender and receiver; and both parties should be aware that they have obligations to each other.

HARRY J. SPAR RETIRES



Mr. Harry J. Spar

On September 7, 1979, Harry J. Spar retired as director of the Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults. He came to the Center in 1971 as associate director, and succeeded Dr. Peter J. Salmon as its director in March, 1977. His accomplishments place him among outstanding leaders in the field of work for the blind and deaf-blind. Imbued with old-fashioned principles, he shunned the limelight and public



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